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ABSTRACT

In 1893, in just 184 days, 28 million people, about one-third of the U.S. population, visited the World's Colombian Exposition in Chicago (Illinois). This lesson focuses on petitioning the federal government, peaceably assembling, and exercising freedom of speech and religion, all of which are protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The lesson correlates to the National History Standards and to the National Standards for Civics and Government. The lesson's primary source document is the petition signed by Thomas A. Edison and 49 others of Orange, New Jersey, asking for the repeal of the act closing the World's Columbian Exposition on Sundays. The lesson presents the historical background (with four resources) about the World's Columbian Exposition; describes the many events which occurred; and suggests diverse teaching activities for classroom implementation, including an introductory activity, document analysis, student research projects, group discussion, and creative writing. Appended are the Edison document and a written document analysis worksheet. (BT)

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THE CONSTITUTION COMMUNITY

The Development of the Industrial United States (1870-1900)

Petition Signed by Thomas A. Edison for Sunday Openings at the World's Columbian Exposition

By Linda Simmons

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http://www.nara.gov/education/classrm.html

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The Constitution Community is a partnership between classroom teachers and education specialists from the National Archives and Records Administration. We are developing lessons and activities that address constitutional issues, correlate to national academic standards, and encourage the analysis of primary source documents. The lessons that have been developed are arranged according to historical era.

SO033590

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Petition Signed by Thomas A. Edison for Sunday Openings at the World's Columbian Exposition

From the Laboratory of Thomas A. Edison.

Constitutional Connection

This lesson focuses on petitioning the federal government, peaceably assembling, and exercising freedom of speech and religion, all of which are protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution.

This lesson correlates to the National History Standards.

Era 6 -The Development of the Industrial United States (1870-1900)

- **Standard 2B** -Demonstrate understanding of the struggle for equal rights.
- **Standard 2C** -Demonstrate understanding of how new cultural movements at different social levels affected American life.

This lesson correlates to the National Standards for Civics and Government.

Standard I.B.4 -Explain and evaluate competing ideas regarding the relationship between political and economic freedoms.
Standard II.A.2 -Explain the extent to which Americans have internalized the values and principles of the Constitution and attempted to make its ideals realities.

Cross-curricular Connections

Share this assignment with colleagues who teach U. S. government, U.S. history, and any course that requires students learn research skills using Internet sources and other primary sources.

List of Documents

1. Petition signed by Thomas A. Edison and 49 others of Orange, New Jersey, praying for the repeal of the act closing the World's Columbian Exposition on Sundays. (cover letter , petition)

Historical Background

In 1893, in just 184 days, 28 million people, about one-third of the American population, visited the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Beyond the exhibits, visitors witnessed a panoply of constitutional rights. In particular, they saw the First Amendment in action. Citizens petitioned the fair's managers. Citizens assembled peaceably. Citizens exercised freedom of speech and religion. The subjects of the petitions, assemblies, and speeches foreshadowed 20th century debates over social issues, including religion, gender, and race. Chicago itself testified to rapid urban growth and a Phoenix-like ability to rebuild after the devastation of the Great Fire. Now the population totaled about 1,550,000, with one-third foreign born. The city was celebrating 400 years of "progress" since Christopher Columbus's discovery of America and anticipating a new century of greater progress. Progress meant new products, such as Cracker Jacks, Pabst Beer, and Juicy Fruit gum. Progress meant new landscape architecture, exemplified at the fair with lagoons and paths designed by Frederick Law Olmstead. Progress meant new technology, featured in exhibits of George Westinghouse's alternating-current generators and Thomas Edison's moving-picture kinetograph. Progress meant sculptures on a grand scale, such as Daniel Chester French's "The Republic" that stood as a monument to democratic ideology. The fair's 65,000 exhibits certainly celebrated the progressive, happier side of the 1890s. However, amid the testimonials to American progress, the strains and stresses of an urbanizing and industrializing society bubbled to the surface.

Within the walls of the beaux-arts-style architectural structures, the World Congress Auxiliary, one of the groups that helped organize the fair, offered a vast program of public events. Almost 700,000 visitors attended 1,245 sessions. Speakers, protected by the First Amendment, lectured on women's progress, medicine, temperance, social reform, education, engineering, government, philosophy, Sunday rest, agriculture, and real estate. The issues certainly divided the audience. So did the schedule for the sessions. In facing the question of scheduling the events at the fair, the managers touched off a volatile debate. Should the fair open on Sundays? The Fair managers waffled. Among other things, their debate revealed growing social and economic tensions between classes. Established social mores echoed Puritan blue laws: no businesses opened on Sundays. At one point, opponents of Sunday openings persuaded Congress to pass a resolution prohibiting funding for Sunday openings. In response, supporters of Sunday openings

resorted to an exercise of First Amendment rights. They petitioned Congress. And they recognized the advantage of having a "big name" as a signatory. The name Thomas Edison dominated the list of signatures attached to a "Petition to Congress to Repeal the Act Closing the World's Columbian Exposition on Sundays." Most of Edison's Orange, New Jersey, laboratory employees penned their names on the petition as well. Sunday openings, they argued in a petition subtitled "Religious Toleration is Christian Civilization," would open a world of education, art, and appreciation. Thus their petition, an action protected by the First Amendment, cited another right within the First: the freedom of religion. The petition summarized a larger debate: How would the country deal with workers who depended on industry for 6-day-a-week jobs, not on personal relationships with employers? The working class, central to industrialization, could visit the fair only on Sundays. Fair managers first closed, then opened, then closed on Sundays. As novelist Henry James remarked, "the dreadful chill of change" filled the air.

Speakers at the Women's Building found themselves at the center of other controversy. Authorizing and building the "Women's" Building had marked another "dreadful chill" for some who feared it as a recognition of new roles for women. To manage the fair, Congress had created an all-male commission. In turn, Congress, after hearing from determined American women, permitted the commission to appoint a Board of Lady Managers. The board's chair, Bertha Honore Palmer (Mrs. Potter Palmer), found the Lady Managers both praised and condemned. Supporters praised them for envisioning a Woman's Building, filled with works created by women; opponents criticized them for separating women's works from men's. Ultimately they built the Woman's Building, following architect Sophia Hayden's plan, and filled it with exhibits from American, European, and Latin American women. Japanese women, the Japanese ambassador to the United States wrote, were not "sufficiently advanced" to serve in planning a Japanese exhibit. Bertha Palmer recognized the use of federal dollars in her dedicatory speech: "Even more important that the discovery of Columbus is the fact that the general [federal] government has just discovered women." The conflicts between the Lady Managers and the all-male commissioners reflected the late 19th-century debates over women's roles and contributed to the growth of the suffrage movement and, in 1919, to the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution.

The Board of Lady Managers included no black Americans. At first the fair planned no role for black Americans. In protest, Mrs. Ida B. Wells distributed her pamphlet, "The Reason Why the Colored American is not Represented in the World's Columbian Exhibition." Ida Wells, a native of Holly Springs, Mississippi, who led an anti-lynching crusade in the South before moving to New York, asked: "Those visitors to the World's Colombian Exposition . . . especially foreigners will naturally ask . . . Why are not the colored people who constitute so large an element of the American population, and who have contributed so large a share to American greatness, more visibly present and better represented in this World's Exposition? Why are they not taking part in this glorious celebration of the four-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of their country? Are they so dull and stupid as to feel no interest in this great event? " Minus the vote, Wells made great use of her First Amendment rights. With Frederick Douglass as the co-author of her pamphlet, Wells addressed the controversy of African American representation at the

fair. They won a role. Separate from the Lady Managers, black women formed the Women's Columbian Auxiliary Association, following a pattern of creating "auxiliary" associations common in the United States. Black women lecturers at the World's Congress of Representative Women--Hallie Q. Brown of Tuskegee, Sarah J. Early of Tennessee, and Frannie Barrie Williams--offered differing views of black women as citizens. Should they dedicate themselves to manual labor? Should they solicit social equality? Should they strive for political equality? Frederick Douglass, present every day to represent the Haitian government, concluded: "I have heard tonight what I hardly expected ever to live to hear. I have heard refined, educated, colored ladies addressing--and addressing successfully--one of the most intelligent white audiences that I ever looked upon." The First Amendment protected them; the 19th was still a dream.

As Chauncey Depew suggested in an interview with the *New York Times* on June 19,1893, the fair was "the world in miniature." As such, amid all the hoopla and the new products, class, racial, and gender conflicts permeated the fair just as they were permeating American society at large. The exercise of the First Amendment protected the debaters, regardless of the popularity or unpopularity of their positions.

Resources

Badger, R. Reid. *The Great American Fair: The World's Columbian Exposition and American Culture.* Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1979.

Schulman, Bruce R. "Interactive Guide to the World's Columbian Exposition." http://users.vnet.net/schulman/Columbian/columbian.html

Sklar, Kathryn Kish and Thomas Dubin. "Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1830-1930, http://www.binghamton.edu/womhist/index.html

Wells, Ida Bell, and Frederick Douglas. "The Reason Why the Colored American is not Represented in the World's Columbian Exposition." (http://www.carleton.edu/curricular/EDUC/timecap/wells.).

Teaching Activities

Introductory Activity

1. Ask students if they have ever attended a large fair or exhibition or an event such as the Olympic games. Instruct them to list the features they remember from it. These could include the food, entertainment, exhibits, athletic events, and the number of people. Instruct them to also list any controversies they recall. These might include crowd control, hours of operation, cost, and the dress code. Next, inform students that in 1893 a large fair was held in Chicago to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Columbus's voyage to the New World. Ask students how they think this fair would compare with the ones whose features they have described.

Document Analysis

2. Provide each student with a photocopy of the featured document, and distribute a copy of the Written Document Analysis Worksheet , or make a transparency with the following questions: What type of document is this? What is the date of the document? Who wrote the document? What is the purpose of the document? What information in the document helps you understand why it was written? What additional questions does the document prompt? Ask one student to read the document aioud as the others read silently. Lead the class in oral responses to the questions.

Research

3. Ask students to identify other features and controversies of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 by searching Internet and library resources. Divide students into three teams. Assign one team to research using the search engine Yahoo!, the second team to research using WebCrawler, and the third team to use only paper-based research. Ask student groups to draw a map of features that dominated the physical layout of the site, a list of items that made a debut at the fair, and a list of controversies exposed by the fair. Ask a volunteer from each group to show their maps and read their lists to the class. Ask other volunteers to review orally the process their group followed in conducting research. Lead them in a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of search engines and research methods.

4. Require students to evaluate two of the Websites or textual resources they located in Activity 3. The evaluation should include author, authority of author, content, point of view, and date entered and updated. The format for the bibliographical entry should follow the MLA Style. Discuss with students the First Amendment issues that protect postings on Internet.

Group Discussion

5. The featured petition asserts that "The closing of the exposition on Sundays will deprive more than three millions of our people of these advantages." Ask students how they think that number was determined and why so many people would only have been able to attend the fair on a Sunday. Instruct students to read the section of their textbook that discusses labor conditions of the late 19th century.

Creative Writing

6. Ask students to review their texts for information about the Women's Movement during this period. Ask pairs of students to write a dialogue in which two people debate the questions: How should the fair display the exhibits of works produced by American women? Should they be exhibited separately or integrated with the works produced by men?

7. Ask the students to consider whether they would have signed the petition and write a one-page explanation of their decision.

The document included in this project is from Record Group 49, Records of the U.S. Senate. It is available online through the National Archives Information Locator (NAIL) database, <http://www.nara.gov/nara/nail.html> control number NWL-46-PETITION-52AJ271-1. NAIL is a searchable database that contains information about a wide variety of NARA holdings across the country. You can use NAIL to search record descriptions by keywords or topics and retrieve digital copies of selected textual documents, photographs, maps, and sound recordings related to thousands of topics.

This article was written by Linda Simmons, an associate professor at Northern Virginia Community College in Manassas, VA.

Written Document Analysis Worksheet

1. TYPE OF DOCUMENT (Check one):

___ Newspaper	___ Map	___ Advertisement
___ Letter	___ Telegram	___ Congressional record
___ Patent	___ Press release	___ Census report
___ Memorandum	___ Report	___ Other

2. UNIQUE PHYSICAL QUALITIES OF THE DOCUMENT (Check one or more):

___ Interesting letterhead	___ Notations
___ Handwritten	___ "RECEIVED" stamp
___ Typed	___ Other
___ Seals	

3. DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT: _____

4. AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT: _____

POSITION (TITLE): _____

5. FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN? _____

_____

6. DOCUMENT INFORMATION (There are many possible ways to answer A-E.)

A. List three things the author said that you think are important:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B. Why do you think this document was written?

_____

_____

C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.

_____

_____

D. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written:

_____

_____

E. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:

_____

_____

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Cable Address "Edison, Orange"

From the Laboratory
of
Thomas A. Edison.

PHONOGRAPH DICTATION.

Orange N.J. Jan. 4, 1893.

Rob't. J. Thompson, Esq., Sec'y.,
World's Fair Sunday Opening Association
Willard's Hotel, Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:-

I take pleasure in returning to you herewith Petition to Congress to Repeal the Act Closing the World's Columbian Exposition on Sundays, which has been signed by Mr. Edison and most of the Laboratory employees.

Trusting that your efforts to have the Fair opened on Sundays will be successful

I am, yours truly,

A. O. Tate

Private Secretary.
A.

Document 1: Cover Letter for petition signed by Thomas A. Edison and 49 others of Orange, New Jersey, praying for the repeal of the act closing the World's Columbian Exposition on Sundays.

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Petition to Congress to Repeal the Act Closing the World's Columbian Exposition on Sundays.

RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IS CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, in Congress Assembled:

We, the undersigned, citizens of the United States, do hereby respectfully pray and petition your Honorable Body to repeal that portion of the Act entitled "An Act to aid in carrying out the Act of Congress providing for an International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures and Products of the Soil and Mine, to be held in the City of Chicago, in the State of Illinois, in the year 1892, and for other purposes," approved April 25, 1890, which provides that the Exposition buildings and grounds shall be closed and guarded on Sundays, and that no part of the moneys appropriated by the Act of Congress, or by the World's Columbian Exposition, shall be used for the opening and maintaining of the Exposition buildings and grounds

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